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ART. I.—*Supplement to the Encyclopædia Britannica. Article, "Beauty."* Edinburgh, December, 1816.

To discover what beauty is, and in what manner it affects us, has long been a favourite object of speculative curiosity. The learned have pursued this inquiry with ardour, from its apparently intimate connexion with some of the most interesting truths of intellectual philosophy; and many of the higher order of artists have been led to anticipate, from the success of their researches, an almost infinite improvement of their powers to please. But no such improvement seems likely to result from these speculations. For him, who would paint a fine picture, it may be about as useful to inquire into the nature of beauty, as for one, who would acquaint himself with history, to penetrate into the nature of truth, or for one, who would feel the force of a mathematical demonstration, to develop the fundamental principles of human belief. In this, as in most other subjects, men have commenced with what is difficult and remote, and afterwards proceeded to what is intelligible and familiar,—have loved to systematize and speculate, rather than to examine and compare. But however misguided and unsuccessful these researches, in general, may have been, they are neither useless nor uninteresting. Acuteness has been displayed, in this very abstruse metaphysical problem, almost proportioned to its difficulty; nor have great

endeavours been altogether unavailing to subject what is subtle and evanescent to the grasp of ordinary minds. Besides, philosophers are never so zealous and unwearied in collecting particulars, as when employed in building a system; and while making whimsical theories and ardent in the pursuit of impossibilities, they have placed in very striking points of view many important, but unnoticed facts in the nature and history of the fine arts. Their discoveries have illustrated, and enforced many of the doctrines of philosophical criticism. Their writings have borrowed many attractions from the objects they describe, and have contributed very much to cherish among literary men a fondness for abstract speculation.

A song, a tune, a picture, a poem, an ethical maxim and a mathematical theorem—the external appearances of the material world and the internal mechanism of the mind, are all denominated beautiful. If the use of this word in our language be considered just, and we know of no other basis for our reasonings, the emotions awakened by the objects, on which we bestow this appellation, are extremely various and dissimilar. On a first view of this subject, one would naturally suppose that a theory, professing to explain the nature of beauty, should comprise all the different sources of our delight. If utility always affords gratification, and a beautiful object pleases by its usefulness, as well as by its colour and form, or if any sensation be always grateful, and this be found among the pleasures, which a beautiful object affords, it would seem natural that utility and a power of producing agreeable sensations should be ranked among the constituent elements of beauty. We may find some circumstances to limit the extent of this remark; but without farther examination we should suppose that the fragrance of the rose, as well as its colour, every thing, in short, which enters into and heightens the delightful effect of beauty, should be ranked among its elements. Leaving for the present the objections to this principle, we shall proceed to point out some prominent features of individuals in this class of objects.

The presence of some beautiful objects *directly* excites some emotion. Brisk, lively tunes inspire us with mirthful, and slow, plaintive tunes with mournful feelings. Moral beauty calls forth our admiration of one, who could rise above the vulgar passions of selfishness and timidity. Much of the power of tragedy depends on the natural effect, which the

exhibition of signs of distress always produces in moving our compassion.—To be *reminded of past emotions* often affords us high delight, and we consider that beautiful with which they were associated. A tune, to which we were accustomed to listen with indifference, is now beautiful, because it was the favourite of an absent or a departed friend. Some things receive this appellation, because they please what have been called our acquired senses, by their utility or fitness. Domestick animals would scarcely have occupied a position so striking in most landscapes, did they not contribute so largely to the comfort and convenience of mankind. To this head we may refer much of the beauty of architecture, and still more of all mechanical contrivances.—Resemblance often confers much beauty on things in themselves indifferent. A very large share of the pleasure, which uneducated men feel in the contemplation of pictures and statues, flows from the unexpected perception of a strong resemblance between what is living and what is inanimate. Contrast, if it does not often render things, in themselves indifferent, beautiful, at least heightens the pleasing effect of beauty. Virgil's description of the stillness of night and the sleep of nature would be read with little interest, if not contrasted with the restlessness of the unhappy Dido. In the fragment of Simonides, of which our last number contained a translation, how beautiful is the contrast of the dashing of waves and the cares of the sorrowful mother, with the tranquil and undisturbed repose of her sleeping infant. Admiration of the skill and genius of the artist constitutes a chief constituent in the emotions, which we experience in viewing a fine work of art. We sympathise with the triumph of the artist, when he has overcome a great difficulty. This, we cannot but believe, is the great source of beauty in French tragedy. We wonder at the skill of the poet, who moves with ease and grace, though fettered by all the rules of French tragedy and French versification. To please the touch, the smell, or the palate, frequently heightens the beauty of natural objects. To its fragrance, the rose is indebted for its supremacy among flowers. Mr. Burke observes, 'I do not recollect any beautiful object, which is not smooth;' there are, no doubt, many; but we need not blush to own how widely these gratifications of sense participate in many of our more refined enjoyments. How much that 'annual intoxication of spirits,' which we hail with joy at the opening of spring, depends on the softness of the air, and the agreeable

relaxation of the animal fibre, all must be sensible, who, after enjoying in our climate a fine morning for a while, have felt how instantly a turn of the vane dissolved the enchantment.

Those who approach this subject, without any preconceived opinions, will, we believe, acknowledge that these are some of the chief pleasures, which they derive from the perception of beauty. We have not attempted a complete classification; some we have intentionally omitted, because they have been the subjects of controversy. Those, which we have enumerated, are seldom found unmingled; and like many natural substances often produce very different effects, when alone and when in combination. We find thus in beautiful objects the following means of gratification,—a power to produce emotions, or to suggest them, or things, which have produced them; to produce or suggest pleasing sensations, to gratify our sense of fitness and utility, to excite the mind to contrast or to compare. Without any reasons being urged in opposition, it would then be a philosophical reply to the question, what are the elements of beauty?—all these different sources of pleasure in things which are called beautiful. If these are all elements of beauty, it is obviously impossible to resolve them into any one principle of our nature; they are dissimilar and distinct. All that the subject admits is to classify and arrange the different sorts of gratification, to determine what will delight alone, and what only from its situation and relations; what is the result of universal and what of arbitrary associations.

The only fair objection to this conclusion, worthy of any reply, has been often made, and again and again repeated by those, who have not fully comprehended its meaning. It is said, that when we ask, what is beauty? we do not mean to ask what are the means of pleasing, which things beautiful possess, but what is there common to them all. This objection proceeds on a philological assumption, that where many things are classed together under the same name, there must of necessity be some leading idea, running through all its different applications. This is very explicitly stated by the author of the article before us, as the ground work of some of his reasonings.

‘Boundless as their diversity may appear, it is plain they *must* resemble each other in *something*, and in something much more definite and definable than merely in being agreeable;—since they

are all classed together in every age and nation under the common appellation of beautiful, and are felt indeed to produce emotions in the mind that have some sort of kindred and affinity. The words Beauty and Beautiful in short must mean something; and are universally felt to mean something much more definite than agreeableness or gratification in general; and while it is confessedly by no means easy to describe or define what that something is, the force and clearness of our perception is demonstrated by the readiness, with which we determine in any particular instance, whether the object of a pleasurable emotion is or is not properly described as Beauty.'

Whatever suggests emotions to any individual is, according to this author, as really beautiful, as Homer's Iliad to all men of taste. Of the truth of the proposition, that all such objects 'are classed together, in every age and nation,' we must require rather stronger evidence than either this, or, we believe, any other writer, can furnish. We think the philological axiom, which these assertions are brought to maintain, an unfounded prejudice, and totally unsupported by any thing in the structure of language or the laws of thought. If a term in its second application loses much of its primitive meaning, we are at a loss to conceive why, in its third or fourth application, it is impossible that it should lose the whole of what it held in common with the first, and retain only what is common to the second and third. Why language should be arbitrary in every other respect, and uniform only in this, we know not. If language be equally uniform in the application of other terms, why do we not search for what there is common to the fruit that is *good* to the palate, the medicine that is *good* for a fever, and the conduct that is *good* for the purposes of ambition; as well as for what is common to the *beautiful* sky, the *beautiful* tune and the *beautiful* theorem? When we first read in Mr. Stewart's Philosophical Essays a refutation of this axiom, we were a little surprised that he should take so much pains to remove so palpable an error. To meet with it again, in a work intended to give a general view of the present state of science in an article written by an author so able and popular, struck us with something more than surprise. We regret, though we cannot complain, that while Mr. Stewart clearly proved that a word may be extended in its application to things which have no quality or attribute in common with that to which it originally belonged, he did not demonstrate the utter failure of all attempts to discover the common idea of the word beauty in all its various uses.

The analogy of language may not prove that there is such an idea, and yet, by an attentive observation, we may detect it. With a view to display the absolute impossibility of detecting any common quality or attribute of all beautiful objects other than mere agreeableness or gratification in general, we shall now examine the theory of Mr. Alison and that of our author, which is stated to be substantially the same. It is necessary to premise, that these theories, in order to fulfil their design, must exhibit something, which is not only common but peculiar.

The emotion of taste, or that produced by sublime or beautiful objects, (of which the former is now considered as a species of the latter,) is, in Mr. Alison's opinion, a complex emotion. All things, really beautiful, have in common and peculiar to themselves, that they always produce some simple emotion combined with a certain exercise of the imagination. Our objections to this doctrine are briefly these. The word emotion is made to include not merely the exercise of some feeling or social affection; it often means nothing more definite than a vague gratification or agreeableness. He makes the phrase, 'exercise of the imagination,' to mean the passing of 'a train of ideas of emotion' through the mind, which sometimes does and sometimes does not involve an effort of the imagination. Neither do we think that the train of thoughts, which beautiful objects call up in the mind, can always be denominated, with propriety, ideas of emotion. But granting all these objections to be unfounded, it must be acknowledged, that though this complex emotion be common, it is not peculiar to beautiful objects; for things which are not beautiful nor ugly inspire emotions, and are followed by 'trains of ideas of emotion,' as well as those which are. We should smile to hear a merchant talk of the beauty of a large fortune he had just acquired, or an orator descant upon the sublimity of the applauding shouts, with which a popular assembly had just rewarded his eloquence. This complex emotion is not common, and if it were common, it is not peculiar, and therefore does not solve the problem proposed. While we cannot but admire Mr. Alison's exquisite sensibility as an observer, his ingenuity as a theorist, and his elegance as a writer, we do not at all accord with him in his conclusions. He has gone as far towards effecting an impossibility, as any of his predecessors. Many of his remarks are of the highest importance, no less to the artist and the poet, than the scholar and the critic.

We shall now endeavour to present to our readers a brief sketch of the system, which is, we believe, justly ascribed to Mr. Jeffreys.

‘In our opinion, then, our sense of beauty depends entirely on our previous experience of simpler pleasures or emotions, and consists in the *suggestion* of agreeable or interesting sensations [emotions] with which we had formerly been made familiar by the direct and intelligible agency of our common sensibilities;—and that vast variety of objects, to which we give the common name of beautiful, become entitled to that appellation, merely because they all possess the power of recalling or reflecting those sensations, of which they have been the accompaniments, or with which they have been associated in our imaginations by any more casual bond of association,’—‘and that, as an infinite variety of objects may thus reflect interesting ideas, so all of them may acquire the title of beautiful, although utterly diverse and disparate in their nature, and possessing nothing in common, but this accidental power of reminding us of other emotions.’ ‘The basis of it’—this theory—‘is that the beauty, which we impute to outward objects, is nothing more than the reflection of our own inward emotions, and is made up entirely of certain little portions of love, pity and affection, which have been connected with these objects, and still adhere, as it were, to them, and move us anew, when they are again presented to our observation.’

In attempting to account for the difference between the emotions of beauty, and the primary affections, of which it is the reflection—

‘In the first place, it should make some difference on the primary affections, to which we have alluded, that in the cases alluded to, they are reflected from material objects, and not directly excited by their natural causes. The light of the moon has a very different complexion from that of the sun, though it is in substance the same light; and glimpses of interesting or even of familiar objects, caught unexpectedly from a mirror placed at a distance from those objects, will affect us, like some allusions in poetry, very differently from the natural perception of these objects in their ordinary relations. The perception of beauty, too, implies a certain exercise of the imagination, that is not required in the case of direct emotion, and is sufficient of itself, both to give a new character to every emotion, that is suggested through the intervention of such an exercise, and to account for our classing all the various emotions, that are thus suggested, under the denomination of beauty. When we are injured, we feel indignation,



—when we are wounded, we feel pain—when we see suffering, we feel compassion—and when we witness any splendid act of heroism or generosity, we feel admiration, without any effort of the imagination, or the intervention of any picture or vision in the mind. When we feel indignation or pity or admiration, in consequence of seeing some piece of inanimate matter, that merely suggests or recalls to us the ordinary causes or proper object of these emotions, it is evident, that our fancy is kindled by a sudden flash of recollection ; and that the effect is produced by a sort of poetical creation, that is conjured up in the mind. It is this active and heated state of the imagination, and this divided and busy occupation of the mind, that constitutes the great peculiarity of the emotions we experience from the perception of beauty.\*

Things acquire this power of suggesting emotions, from having been the universal signs, the arbitrary or accidental concomitants of emotions, or from bearing some analogy to them. After remarking that it is easy to conceive that a picture or a statue should affect us nearly in the same manner as the originals, he presents us with the following exemplifications of his theory ; they may serve to relieve, for a while, those of our readers, who are not very fond of spinning metaphysical cobwebs.

‘ Take, for instance, the case of a common English landscape—green meadows with fat cattle—canals or navigable rivers—well fenced, well cultivated fields—neat, clean, scattered cottages—a humble antique church with church yard elms, and crossing hedges—rows—all seen under bright skies and in good weather.—There is much beauty, as every one will acknowledge in such a scene. But in what does that beauty consist ? Not certainly in the mere mixture of colours and forms ; for colours more pleasing and lines more graceful (according to any theory of grace, that may be preferred) might be spread upon a board or a painter’s pallet, without engaging the eye to a second glance, or raising the least emotion in the mind ;—but in the picture of human happiness, that is presented to our imagination and affections—in the visible and unequivocal signs of comfort and enjoyment—and of that secure and successful industry that insures its continuance—and of the piety by which it is exalted—and of the simplicity, by which it is contrasted with the guilt and the fever of a city life—and the images of health and temperance and plenty, which it exhibits to every eye—and in the glimpses which it affords to warmer imaginations of those primitive or fabulous times, when man was uncorrupted by luxury and ambition, and of those humble retreats, in which we still delight to imagine, that love and philosophy may find an unpolluted

asylum. At all events, however, it is human feeling that excites our sympathy and forms the object of our emotions. It is man and man alone that we see in the beauties of the earth, which he inhabits—or if a more sensitive and extended sympathy connect us with the lower families of animated nature, and make us rejoice with the lambs that bleat on the uplands or the cattle that ruminate in the valley, or even with the living plants, that drink the bright sun and the balmy air beside them, it is still the idea of enjoyment,—of feelings that animate the existence of sentient beings—that calls forth all our emotions and is the parent of all the beauty, with which we proceed to invest the inanimate creation around us.

‘Instead of this quiet and tame English landscape, let us now take a Welsh or a Highland scene, and see whether its beauties will admit of being explained on the same principle. Here we shall have lofty mountains and rocky and lonely recesses—tufted woods hung over precipices—lakes intersected with castled promontories—ample solitudes of unploughed and untrodden vallies—nameless and gigantick ruins—and mountain echoes repeating the scream of the eagle and the roar of the cataract. This too is beautiful ;—and to those, who can interpret the language it speaks, far more beautiful than the prosperous scene, with which we have contrasted it. Yet lonely as it is, it is to the recollection of man and of human feelings, that its beauty also is owing. The mere forms and colours, that compose its visible appearance, are no more capable of exciting any emotion in the mind, than the forms and colours of a Turkey carpet. It is sympathy with the present or the past, or the imaginary inhabitants of such a region, that alone gives it either interest or beauty ; and the delight of those, who behold it, will always be found to be in exact proportion to the force of their imaginations, and the warmth of their social affections. The leading impressions here are those of romantick seclusion, and primeval simplicity ; lovers sequestered in these blissful solitudes ‘from towns and toils remote,’ and rustick poets and philosophers communing with nature at a distance from the low pursuits and selfish malignity of ordinary mortals ;—then there is the sublime impression of the mighty power, which piled the massive cliffs upon each other, and rent the mountains asunder, and scattered their giant fragments at their base, and all the images connected with the monuments of ancient magnificence and extinguished hostility—the feuds and the combats and the triumphs of its wild and primitive inhabitants contrasted with the stillness and desolation of the scenes where they lie interred—and the romantick ideas attached to their ancient traditions and the peculiarities of their present life—their wild and enthusiastick poetry—their gloomy superstitions—their attachments to their chiefs—the

dangers and the hardships and the enjoyments of their lonely huntings and fishings—their pastoral shielings on the mountains in summer—and the tales and the sports that amuse the little groups that are frozen into their vast and trackless vallies in winter. Add to all this, the traces of a vast and obscure antiquity, that are impressed on the language and the habits of the people, and on the cliffs and caves and gulfy torrents of the land ; and the solemn and touching reflection perpetually recurring of the weakness and insignificance of man, whose generations thus pass away into oblivion, with all their toils and ambition, while nature holds on her unvarying course, and pours out her streams and renews her forests with undecaying activity, regardless of the fate of her proud and perishable sovereign.’

Eloquent as these passages may appear, it is for their eloquence alone we can admire them. These powerful descriptions betray an extreme inconsistency in this writer’s opinions. The mere recollection of emotions, which our personal experience would enable such prospects to suggest, would move the mind with a feeble impulse. Robbed of the splendid imagery, in which the imagination invests them, these beautiful scenes would be regarded with a listless eye. We are not aware, that any of what is here considered the beauty of these objects would escape the objections which Mr. Jeffreys urges as conclusive against a part of Mr. Alison’s theory.

‘The perception of beauty, we hold to be quite instantaneous, and altogether as immediate, as the perception of the external qualities of the object, to which it is ascribed.—In the long train of interesting meditations, to which Mr. Alison refers—in the delightful reveries, in which he would make the sense of beauty consist—it is obvious that we must soon lose sight of the external object, which gave the first impulse to our thoughts ; and though we may *afterwards* reflect upon it with increased interest and gratitude, as the parent of so many charming images, it is impossible to conceive that the perception of *its* beauty can ever depend upon a long series of various and shifting emotions.’

We are not aware, that any one of the impressions, which these scenes strike upon the mind, can be said to depend upon the accidental power of suggesting emotions, which these objects may have acquired by their relation to our past feelings, in the same sense as weeping is said to derive its power of moving our sympathy, from having been the sign of distress, or laughter of gaiety.—The common idea, of which we have been in search, is, according to this theory, the suggestion of

emotions. Our readers may be somewhat at a loss to affix a definite meaning to these words. We must confess ourselves to be much in the like predicament. When philosophical tenets are exhibited in a figurative dress, it is not always easy to divest them of their garb of concealment. We cannot shew precisely what signification should be attached to these terms ; but we believe we *can* shew, that of whatever they may be deemed significant, they will afford no great assistance in the desired solution of the problem. If it be meant, that objects are beautiful only as they call up the remembrance, of what we have formerly felt, we would willingly rest the decision of this question on the personal experience of any man of taste ; whether in most instances the recollection of emotions, modified as it may be by a direct perception, be at all identified with the emotions of beauty. But as it is a fashion of no short duration, when any appeal is made to facts, on a point in controversy, for each party to comprehend and believe only what favours its own side of the question ; we shall endeavour to adduce something else in our support.

Take the first example cited from this author, and one certainly not the least favourable to his opinions. If a statue derived its whole beauty from suggesting emotions, which the sight of the original had always produced, the more striking the resemblance, the greater should be the effect. But the statue of an individual, attired in the dress he was accustomed to wear, must impress us with far more lively recollections, than in an ancient garb ; why have not statuaries then adopted the costume of the individuals whom they imitate, and not of a remote antiquity ? A painted statue is far more like, than the plain marble or plaster ; yet those, who have seen the celebrated waxen figures of Mrs. Wright in Europe and this country, have found their whole effect very far from agreeable ; the resemblance was perfect, yet few would call the figures beautiful. A painted bust we all know offends the eye. The truth is, the emotions excited by a picture or a statue are very unlike those with which the presence of the original ever does or ever can impress us. Again, the signs of grief, of anger, or of pity would move us with far less power, if they merely reminded us of our own past feelings. Without passions ourselves, we might have remained insensible to their influence. They constitute a language of their own ; and our past feelings teach us its letters. But when we have learned to read, it reveals to us truths, which we never knew before ; it discloses, what will

always possess a strong and permanent interest, the secrets of the hearts of others ; it helps us to solve the enigmas of character, and to unravel the tangled web of human conduct. But as this explanation is refuted by many things in this article itself, we shall not trouble ourselves farther with what the author meant at one time and probably did not mean at another.

As the circumstance of originating a train of interesting recollections, would plainly be inadequate, to distinguish beautiful objects from all others, and to account for all their phenomena, the suggestion of emotions may mean something a little different. When a colour or a sound has long been the sign or concomitant of a grateful emotion, we are apt to regard it with the same feelings, which the thing signified has usually awakened. A particular sound has been heard, as the constant attendant upon joy, and we learn to be moved by the sound itself without any reference to the original cause of the emotion ; very much in the same manner, as men learn to love wealth from its constantly procuring them pleasures or importance ; the means takes place of the end in our affections. This explanation will not include the former, and is defective in omitting that as well as numberless other elements of beauty. A particular form or colour may thus attract our fondness, but the colours of paintings and the forms of statues cannot be regarded as signs of skill in the artist, or natural scenes, as signs of the power and benevolence of the Deity. These do not move, in the same manner, our admiration and affection. In one, the emotions are immediate and almost mingled with the qualities of the object ; in the other, though equally ardent and strong, they are neither direct nor instantaneous. With still less propriety can we consider models in architecture, or mechanical contrivances or mathematical theorems as the signs of fitness or utility. Besides, there are a thousand things, which thus suggest emotions, which are very far from beautiful. The rod, with which he has been whipped, must suggest to the school boy very numerous and violent emotions of rage and mortification, and yet we do not know that he would regard it as either more beautiful or sublime, or even much more ugly or deformed than any other birch. A friend's slippers may reflect our past emotions almost as powerfully as his picture, yet this would hardly entitle them to these appellations. We do not know, that even the example, which so forcibly illustrates the difference between our ordinary recollections, and those called

up in the mind by the presence of an object with which they are closely allied, would strengthen this author's theory. We doubt whether the broken spoon, on which the name of London brought at once to the hearts of captain Cook and his companions, in a far distant land, the numberless recollections, that cling around the memory of home, was felt to be peculiarly beautiful. But defective as this explanation appears, it is according to this alone that the perception of beauty can be pronounced instantaneous.

If we accept this writer's statement of his own theory, we have seen that it is entirely unsatisfactory, but we may gather from his own assertions and examples some opinion of this sort, that beauty consists in a power of awakening emotions in any other way than by directly exciting them. This seems fully entitled to be placed in competition with M. Diderot's very definite and significant resolution of beauty into the perception of relations. This is nothing more than comprising under one name many different properties and effects. But comprehensive or rather indefinite as this theory is, it is totally inadequate to fulfil its purpose. To say nothing of those objections, which apply to this in common with the others, it can be strictly applicable to material objects only, and to a portion only of them. The beauty of theorems, poems and of moral conduct, this writer considers, as produced by the suggestion of emotions in a manner somewhat more direct. What to understand by suggesting emotions more directly, we cannot divine ; except it be directly exciting them. In some of these objects, nothing to be called an emotion is felt but admiration, and this is of course a direct feeling. Moral beauty affects us instantaneously—it appeals at once to the hearts of those whose sensibilities are not diseased. Whether our love of the morally beautiful or sublime be the gift of education, or the natural and spontaneous dictate of the heart, we love and admire at once, without the intervention of the memory or imagination. If then the only common attribute of beautiful objects be their exciting present or recalling past emotions, it is idle to pursue our inquiries any farther. Whatever pleases or offends, or recalls in any form our past pleasure or disgust may be beautiful, and this is just as much a discriminating characteristick of them, as it is of soft bodies, that they are perceived by the touch.

It is a favourite opinion of this author, strenuously enforced in the illustrations of his theory already presented to our read-

ers, and one which he seems to view as not only an important but a peculiar appendage to it, that the material universe derives its whole interest from accidental connections with the thoughts and feelings of sentient beings. This and his own theory, he seems to regard as leaning upon each other for support, and the truth of the one as indissolubly connected with the truth of the other. We cannot take up the thread of this reasoning. To be interesting and to be beautiful, are often very different, and constantly distinguished from each other in the use of language. But if all material objects were beautiful merely from our sympathy with the enjoyments and sufferings of beings like ourselves, we should not approach a step nearer the conclusion, that their beauty consists in the suggestion of our past emotions. The English landscape and the Welsh mountain scene are rendered more interesting by the remembrance of their past inhabitants, and by the busy creations, with which fancy loves to people them. To engage our sympathy they must exhibit beings, who are susceptible of like sensations with ourselves—with some elements of the human character, however variously modified and combined, by the active and controlling agency of imagination ; something which we can conceive, and imagine that we feel. But while we sympathise with them, we experience something very distinct from the remembrance of our former feelings ; we go along with the joys and sorrows of others, with as strong and direct an impulse, as we love a friend, or resent an injury. We can sympathise with distress, which we have never suffered, and have little reason to apprehend. Whether we are thus enabled to enter into the enjoyments and griefs of others only by conceiving what would be the state of our own minds in their situation, or sympathy be a direct and natural principle, its exertions are easily distinguished from our recollections, however moving or forcibly recalled. Sympathy with the fortunes of beings like ourselves enters indeed very largely into the emotions of beauty. Whatever concerns them, possesses a strong and unfailing interest, and it may be to them, that natural scenery is indebted for its highest charms. But the principles, through which we are affected by these objects, as connected with our own feelings and those of other agents, are essentially distinct, and it is only to confound things entirely different, to refer them to any one law of our constitution.

We might concede to the Platonick school, that it is man

alone we behold in the beauty of the material universe, without at all acknowledging that beauty consists in the suggestion of emotions. It might be true, that all beautiful objects present to the mind either ideas of power and benevolence in the Deity, the joys or sufferings of ourselves or our fellow men, the gratifications or the pains of animals lower in the scale of creation, or the busy employment of beings of the mind. But to consider this as a common and peculiar characteristic of these objects, would be no less absurd than to assert it to be the common and peculiar property of men, that they all either think, feel, act, please, offend, move or are moved. Beautiful objects may engage our feelings in behalf of ourselves or of others, of beings, that exist or may be imagined, but some of them do one of these things and some another, and in various ways. We may say then, they all agree in suggesting emotions. But this is not resembling each other in any one quality or effect; it is only shewn after so much reasoning, that they have a common attribute in a name, differing a little from that commonly applied to them, and neither very significant nor very definite. But we cannot persuade ourselves, that it is necessary to enter any farther into an examination of this theory. If we take the author's statement of it, in its more literal sense, it is founded on a few facts, and seems to constitute, even in them, a sort of explanation, in which nothing is explained; if we receive it with a more extended meaning, we must in this mode of viewing it, at least, class him among the many who make systems by the abuse of terms, and conceal their emptiness under a cloud of unmeaning phrases.

We have in general confined our objections to examples from material objects, but when we extend our observation to the higher walks of poetry, to moral beauty, and to the beauty of philosophical truth, we are irresistibly impelled to conclude that beautiful objects possess nothing in common but a name. Numerous arguments may be brought to fortify us in this conclusion. They may be sought for in the application of the word taste, which is usually employed to signify the power of feeling or of estimating beauty—of the word ugliness, which, if there were any thing common and peculiar to beautiful objects ought to be equally extensive with that of which it is the reverse—in the differences, which may be discerned in the use of the words, in other languages approaching nearest to the word beautiful in ours—still more in the theories themselves which have been framed on this subject, so numerous and so diverse.



It is true of this class of our pleasures generally, that they are neither vulgar nor purely selfish ; we value them highly, because, for the most part, they are more refined than mere sensual indulgence ; we value them more, because others can sympathise with our enjoyment. But it is in the individuals or the species, and not in the class, that we are to look for the discriminating features of the beautiful. We may discover what makes a painting or an epick poem beautiful ; but when we seek for the substance, the very essence of beauty, we lose ourselves, in abstract subtleties. Beauty is not the same thing in a tune and a statue, in a theorem and a poem. One accurate examination of our feelings, while contemplating a fine work of art, will let us more into a knowledge of its powers and effects, than all the speculations of philosophers on its abstract nature. Indeed the difference between what is beautiful and what is not, is often but a difference of degree ;—a little heightened, and the same emotions would be painful ; a little depressed, and they would be almost indifferent. Terror many have believed to be the only source of the sublime ; the same terror a little strengthened is the object of our aversion. Lightning and thunder are sublime, because they awaken in the mind ideas of undefined danger and prodigious power ; the sublimity is heightened by slight personal apprehensions. We look with some pleasure, often with indifference, on the distant lightning ; as it approaches, some personal fears mingle with our feelings, the mind is occupied and deeply impressed ; but when the near oak is shattered, or the lofty spire prostrated, the sublime swells to the terrifick, and men of weak nerves think only of seeking a shelter from danger. The distant view of a sea fight is sublime, especially where our own countrymen, or those in whose fate we feel an interest, are engaged ; to those who have a father or a brother there, it must be attended with extreme suffering. The rumbling sound of an earthquake, to us, who have never experienced any injury from it, is exceedingly sublime ; to the inhabitants of Lisbon or Caraccas, to whom it comes attended with so many and anxious fears for personal security, it must be painful in the extreme. All these objects are highly interesting in description, where the emotions are softened, and not accompanied by any thing painful.

Nor is it the sublime alone, which differs but in degree from the disagreeable or the indifferent. Other kinds of beauty are no farther removed from effects almost opposite.

Any of the different qualities, which, combined make an object beautiful, alone or presented under different circumstances, will pass unnoticed. The freshness of health—the expression of innocence—of gaiety or good feeling—of vivacity or intelligence, alone or in a feeble degree, are perfectly indifferent; but when the appearances which indicate youth and health, of moral purity, of sensibility and intelligence are combined in the female countenance, the most stoical cannot view them with indifference. The little mechanical contrivances, which contribute, but not very largely, to our comfort, please us by their utility;—a little better adapted to abridge our labour or promote our happiness, and we pronounce them beautiful. The mathematical theorem, which opens a more direct road to useful truths, gratifies us by its ingenuity; when the process is made more direct and elementary, we admire its beauty. Numberless objects, which please us by their utility, their fitness, by producing some simple emotions, moving the imagination or by suggesting emotions, could their powers be enlarged in a slight degree, would obtain the appellation of beautiful.

The different circumstances, under which we happen to observe an object, often affect very strongly the pleasures it may afford. He, who should see for the first time in his life the work of a good artist, might admire its beauty; but if he should turn from the Apollo to some inferior production, however admirable in its way or in comparison with others, he would hardly be much affected. Our judgment in matters of taste is often very much influenced, by the expectations we have cherished, by prejudices for or against the author; and although moved in the same way with others, but in a greater or less degree, we should differ with them, as to the epithet we ought to bestow. On the whole, it is quite apparent, that the emotions of beauty are by no means peculiar in their nature, but only in degree; and if this be true of them individually, it is in vain to look through this wide range of objects, for any distinguishing property. The word itself is often used rather vaguely; nor ought this to surprise us, when we consider how eagerly we all indulge our gratitude or revenge, if we may be allowed the expression, towards objects that have much gratified or pained us, by lavishing profusely upon them all the epithets in our language.

If, then, there is no common attribute to beautiful objects,  
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no one thing in them, which claims for all their common appellation; we may regard every thing in them, which bestows or heightens our delight, as an element of beauty. The odours of flowers, the fitness of ornaments in architecture, utility, associations, a power to move any of our simple affections, none of these should be excluded. To pursue our inquiries into the nature of beauty we must examine individual objects, a single poem, or a painting, or a building, and discover what it is that pleases; and every thing which does afford pleasure, enters into the composition of the beautiful.

The emotions, which men of different habits or degrees of sensibility experience even from the same work of art, are often very dissimilar; and the productions of the various arts, often occasion as various effects. The qualities, which delight us in a painting, are not those which delight us in a statue, and still less those which delight us in a piece of music or a poem. In the same painting, one observer is pleased with the exact imitation of the human form, another with the richness of the colouring, and a third with the striking representation of agitated feelings; an artist is enraptured with the attainment of a difficult excellence, or his imagination is kindled, and recalls resembling beauties in the works of some great master; while to the man of more cultivated taste, all these in turn occupy his attention and conspire in ministering to his delight. In a poem, it is neither a perfect imitation of human character, ample and rich descriptions, novelty of invention, nor finished versification, that will alone engage our interest. Many of those, who admire its beauty, can enjoy only a few of numerous excellences; some of finer sensibility may relish them in all their varieties; while the far greater number receive but a weak impulse from separate beauties, and are alive only to their full power and combined effect. A poem is pronounced beautiful, because it exhibits a happy imitation in imaginary beings of human feelings and actions, or it recalls a vivid conception of sublime scenery, or appeals to our sympathy with the exalted or amiable character of its author, or calls forth a laugh at the follies, or abhorrence at the vices of mankind, or relieves us, tired of gross realities, with the airy sports of fancied agents, or because it diversifies and exaggerates or displays in new lights and varied combinations, the existing objects of our fondness. It is not by any one quality, that we are impressed with the beauty of philosophical writings. La Rochefaucauld's max-

ims, degrading to human nature as they appear, at least to superficial readers, have found many to admire their beauty, even among those who would read Mr. Stewart's speculations with delight, from the high views, they so constantly exhibit of the capacities and future fortunes of our species. We cannot even select any one circumstance to determine the beauty of a single department of style. We admire the lavish profuseness of words and images, which display unbounded intellectual wealth ; we admire yet more the simplicity, which disappoints our hopes, and derides our efforts to imitate. Sometimes we admire the skill, sometimes the character of the author, and sometimes we lose sight of the author, while rapt in the subject, or hurried along in the current of our own feelings. It is to the discovery of the sources of our enjoyments in these individual objects, that all our researches should be directed. Many facts may be found in which all the arts agree ; and many rules may be carried from one art into another. But it is true of this, as of all other liberal inquiries, that it is more dangerous to extend than to restrict our general principles.

Of the beautiful in the abstract, we can acquire no farther knowledge than of the progressive generalizations of the term. Mr. Jeffreys complains of Mr. Stewart's Essays, that they are merely philological researches ; this is true, but we believe it to be all the subject admits. With Mr. Stewart's conclusions, our readers must, before this, have discovered our disposition to accord. The progressive extension of the words beautiful and sublime, particularly of the latter, which it is his chief design to trace, is rather ingenious than satisfactory. His work is now chiefly of importance to the metaphysician and philologist. But the high finish of his writings and his highly cultivated sensibility must constantly fascinate men of liberal accomplishments. We could have wished that he had devoted more of his attention to the refutation of the theories of other writers than of Mr. Burke. The habits of philosophical research are not such as best to qualify for success in controversy ; and accordingly he does not possess in a high degree those qualities, which most interest us in discussion. He does not, with the same skill, as many of the most accomplished disputants, bring his arguments to a point and produce the unity of impression so essential to the success of a philosophical reasoner. His most important principles are not very clearly distinguished from those which are less so, and

are seldom stamped upon the mind with sufficient force to leave very enduring traces behind them. It is not such a book as his that we require. It is rather a collection of the most striking facts in the history of the fine arts, with some classification of the various elements of the beautiful—of those which please in themselves and by their relations—of what is accidental and acquired—or natural and universal in this part of our constitution—compiled with accuracy of observation, rather than theoretical skill or fondness for system.

While engaged in the consideration of the different ingredients, which enter into the composition of the beautiful, we said nothing of the beauty of colours and sounds, as distinguished from their accidental expression. It was a principal object in the design of Mr. Alison to explain the various modes, in which these might become connected with our common feelings. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Knight have since endeavoured to maintain their independent beauty ; and Mr. Jeffreys has now taken the field in Mr. Alison's defence. He has here urged, with considerable force and skill, the arguments in proof of their beauty being entirely acquired ; it is here indeed that his chief merit lies, and had he acquiesced more fully in what we conceive less disputable doctrines, we should not have been much disposed to quarrel with him. There are, we must confess, considerable difficulties in the decision of this question, and men of sense may differ respecting it, without the imputation of bigotry.—In describing any thing beautiful, we very commonly distinguish between its colouring and expression. We ascribe to the colours themselves very much of the effect, and not unfrequently our pleasure seems to terminate in them. There can be no doubt, that both colours and sounds either have or acquire an intrinsick beauty—in other words, that they please without the production of any other present emotion. As this, however, is the case with many other objects, which are not naturally allied to our affections, if any satisfactory explanation can be given of the origin of their power to please, we should not be warranted to conclude, that they were independently beautiful. We are not altogether contented with the account, which is generally given of the gradual associations, by which these are, at length, enabled so strongly to influence us. In what consists the power of that spectacle—which first attracts the admiration of the youthful enthusiast, and proves the 'form of beauty smiling at his heart,' and continues to afford delight when taste has received its highest culture—the glo-

ries which surround and follow the descending sun? Other colours have oftener been combined with the exercise of our affections; if their effect is the result of associations, they would please us more, the nearer they approached to colours or or combinations of colours that had before interested us; yet colours more nearly resembling what we can trace, as related to our former feelings, pass every day unnoticed; and so far is a change of hue from lessening the emotion, that every varying shade often seems more pleasing than the past.

The great difficulty attending a belief in the independent beauty of colours arises from the great diversity of standards by which they are estimated in different countries. Yellow is the most pleasing colour to the Chinese, and black to the Venetians. This argument has been carried a little too far; if admitted in its fullest extent, it is not only inconsistent with their independent beauty, but with the doctrine of associations, at least when regarded as necessary and universal. But the fact itself is by no means demonstrated. We are affected by the descriptions, which poets of distant nations and ages have drawn, of scenery different from our own, and it is the design rather than the colours of works of art, not executed in European taste, that strikes us as defective. Accidental associations may bestow on colours, in themselves ugly or pleasing, an artificial beauty or deformity; and such associations may generally be traced in the caprices of national taste. But admitting these diversities to be much wider, than we believe them to be, they are neither so numerous or glaring, as those in the moral feelings of mankind. Yet this diversity in their moral feelings is not in general deemed sufficient to prove, that men do not, on the whole, approve virtue and condemn vice.

Use has appropriated the word beautiful to the objects, which are discerned by the sight or the hearing; and it is no reason for refusing the name to the gratification of these two senses, that they are generally inferior in degree to those of the touch, the smell or the taste. To say that the mere sensual gratifications of the eye or the ear *never* rise to the emotions of beauty, is a sort of reasoning that appears to approach a little too near the nature of the circle. We cannot esteem this question of the same importance, which it has usually held from its connexion with particular theories. Our experience is amply convincing, that colours and sounds possess, whether from nature or accident, something to gratify in themselves. When

certain combinations of colours are presented to casual observers, the eye itself seems feasted, and they inquire no farther. This is sufficient to show, that colours enter largely into the causes of their gratification.

Of the consequences, which would follow the adoption of the theory of associations, one is stated to be the perfect identity of the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque. The sublime and the picturesque may, with propriety, be called species of the beautiful, but are sufficiently distinct from its other species. The use of these terms may lead many to conceive that there is a much greater difference between them and the other species, than actually exists. But we must take language as we find it, and not, because some objects equally deserving are destitute of appropriate appellations, condemn others to the like misfortune. These words are now very well understood and distinguished ; and although we may speak with Mr. Stewart of the sublime beauties of scripture, the beautiful sublime of a rose might perhaps provoke a smile.

To find some universal standard of taste has been a favourite object of research, and has involved, in numberless perplexities, those, who have inquired into the nature of beauty. Criticks have usually referred to the common sense of mankind as a safe guide, and deduced from the successful efforts of artists or writers, numerous rules, according to which they might praise or censure all future productions. It has been the common fault of writers on this subject, and one necessarily attendant on their particular theories, absolutely to decide, that there is either a general standard for all departments of art, or no standard in any. If taste be a mere matter of feeling, we may speak of it as good or bad, but not of its truth or falsehood ; these belong not to feeling, but to opinion. A man prefers Blackmore's Arthur to Homer's Iliad, and we may ridicule his oddness ; but if he asserts that the Arthur is more beautiful than the Iliad, can we pronounce his assertion false, or only odd, eccentric and unnatural ? A thing may present itself in two ways for us to determine on its beauty ; we may judge, in the capacity of an author, as to his own work, or of a critic as to that of another, how well it is adapted to engage the attention and extort the praises of the publick ; or we may speak of its beauty to us, as individuals. In the former case, we must reason from the past decisions of the publick, and obey the canons of criticism, or estimate its probable effect from a more enlarged knowledge of human nature. But it is

its effect on us, as individuals, that constitutes its beauty. If beauty in all objects be the same thing, that taste is true which discerns beauty where it exists, and its absence where it does not ; but if we call different things beautiful for different reasons, in some instances we may call it true or false, in others only natural or eccentric.

In analyzing our emotions at the presence of many beautiful objects, we find an exercise of the judgment, involved in our feelings ; and the opinion we form may be either correct or erroneous. The perception of utility, of fitness, of the sufficient reason, of an adherence to the rules of an art, of power, skill, &c. is consequent to some decision of the understanding, which may be either well founded or groundless. We may speak of the falsity of his taste, who admires Goldsmith for his force and copiousness of diction, and Darwin for his unaffected simplicity, Shakspeare for adhering to the laws of the drama, or Racine for deep and extensive observation of character, Madame de Stael for faithful delineations of human feeling, and Miss Edgeworth for wild and unearthly creations. In general, taste may be true or false, so far as judgment and knowledge are concerned, or as far as we undertake to determine the universality of the associations, by which we ourselves are influenced. When we speak only of our own inclinations and feelings, they can be considered merely as odd and ridiculous, or natural and proper. If we are more interested in Coleridge, than in Milton, our taste may be ridiculed, but it can only be denominated false, in relation to some rules of art, or exercise of judgment. Arbitrary and individual associations may be equally powerful and interesting with those which are universal. But this can hardly be admitted as a reasonable motive for cherishing a want of conformity to the taste of others. If we wish to gain reputation by the publick display of any liberal accomplishment, we must throw off every thing, that is particular and accidental in this part of our constitution. If we would cultivate a high-toned and innocent morality, it is still more necessary to shut the mind to the dangerous influences of those solitary prejudices, which corrupt and distort our moral sensibilities. Here, to be singular is almost to be criminal ; the sources of action are pure, and any new ingredient is too apt to render the waters turbid and bitter and noxious.

The associations, which govern our taste, are closely interwoven with our social affections and private happiness.



The sympathy of our friends heightens these, no less than our other enjoyments. To read an interesting book to a friend recalls, with renewed life, all the emotions, inspired by its first perusal. We are surprised and mortified, if they remain unmoved. It appears to manifest a want of sensibility no less than of understanding. In this consists much of the secret of our friendships and aversions. We can submit to a difference of opinion, but we cannot endure a perpetual crossing of our humours and a total want of fellow feeling. We unavoidably and perhaps justly form in this manner an estimate of character, and a man's taste is often thought a sure key to his intellectual and moral peculiarities. Intimately connected, as the objects of taste are with so much of our business and our conduct, it is of no slight importance that our sensibilities should be open to many of the same impressions as those of our friends, if we need their sympathy or desire their friendship.

If it be necessary to our happiness, that our taste should be conformable to that of others, we must look into the material and intelligible universe for our standard of taste. We must not enslave ourselves to the prejudices of particular arts or particular masters. We must learn to prize the beauties and the moral influences of nature. Whatever is pleasing or grand or impressive in her scenery, must be familiarized, and art be made to bow to her decisions. Art will be liberalized and perfected as it approaches nearer the great models, which are exhibited in the universe. With our admiration of these, all men can learn, in some degree, to sympathise. It is thus that the works of great poets and artists have not been confined to the precincts of a single age. What is adapted to the taste of the times may for a while please more, but it is soon forgotten. It is by habituating the mind to the beauties of nature, that taste is taught to minister to our moral improvement. By allying all that is fair and lovely in her scenery to the best feelings of the heart, even a fine prospect is made to add strength to virtue, and every gratification of taste becomes a new offering of man to his Maker.

In discussing largely the opinions contained in this article, we have said little of the author. He is not entitled to a very high place among philosophical inquirers. There is an indefiniteness in his language, when he undertakes to exhibit his peculiar tenets, that does not usually attend uncommon depth and accuracy of research. His remarks on the theories of

other writers are stated with much clearness and force, and in general evince a just apprehension of the nice dependencies, and remote bearings of their opinions and arguments. It is as a writer, rather than as a philosopher, that he is deservedly popular. In a mere sketch of abstract opinions, we do not expect to find a very studied style. Yet here we may discover many of his peculiarities, and some of his excellences. He delights to present to ordinary readers remote thoughts in a familiar garb; and even in discussing what is extremely subtle, he gives them something, which they comprehend, or at least imagine they comprehend. Sometimes, indeed, those who approach from different directions, like the knights in the fable, might dispute, whether the shield be gold or silver, but all believe they have gained a prize. He always writes with ingenuity, and often with effect. On the whole, he usually had rather interest than enlighten; and we should always welcome him rather as a pleasant fellow traveller, than as a confidential guide to truth.



ART. II.—*A bill to establish an uniform system of bankruptcy throughout the United States.* Washington, February 27, 1818.

THIS bill gave rise to a discussion, which has not yet lost all its interest, or any of its importance. The question, as to what regulations shall be used for compelling the payment of debts, has always been found one of the greatest delicacy and difficulty; and although the practice of nations, upon this subject, has been extremely various, experience has not yet suggested a system free from important objections. In some countries the insolvent debtor has been viewed merely as a criminal, and punished as such. Other nations have acted upon the idea, that when he had become unable to answer the debt with his property, he should be compelled to do so with his body. In some of the countries of the East Indies, it is said, the creditor may not only reduce the debtor himself to slavery, but, likewise, his wife and children, and that he may even violate the chastity of the wife with impunity, though by so doing the debt is considered as discharged. This custom of selling the body of the debtor, who was unable to make payment, likewise existed at Athens and at Rome. Solon re-